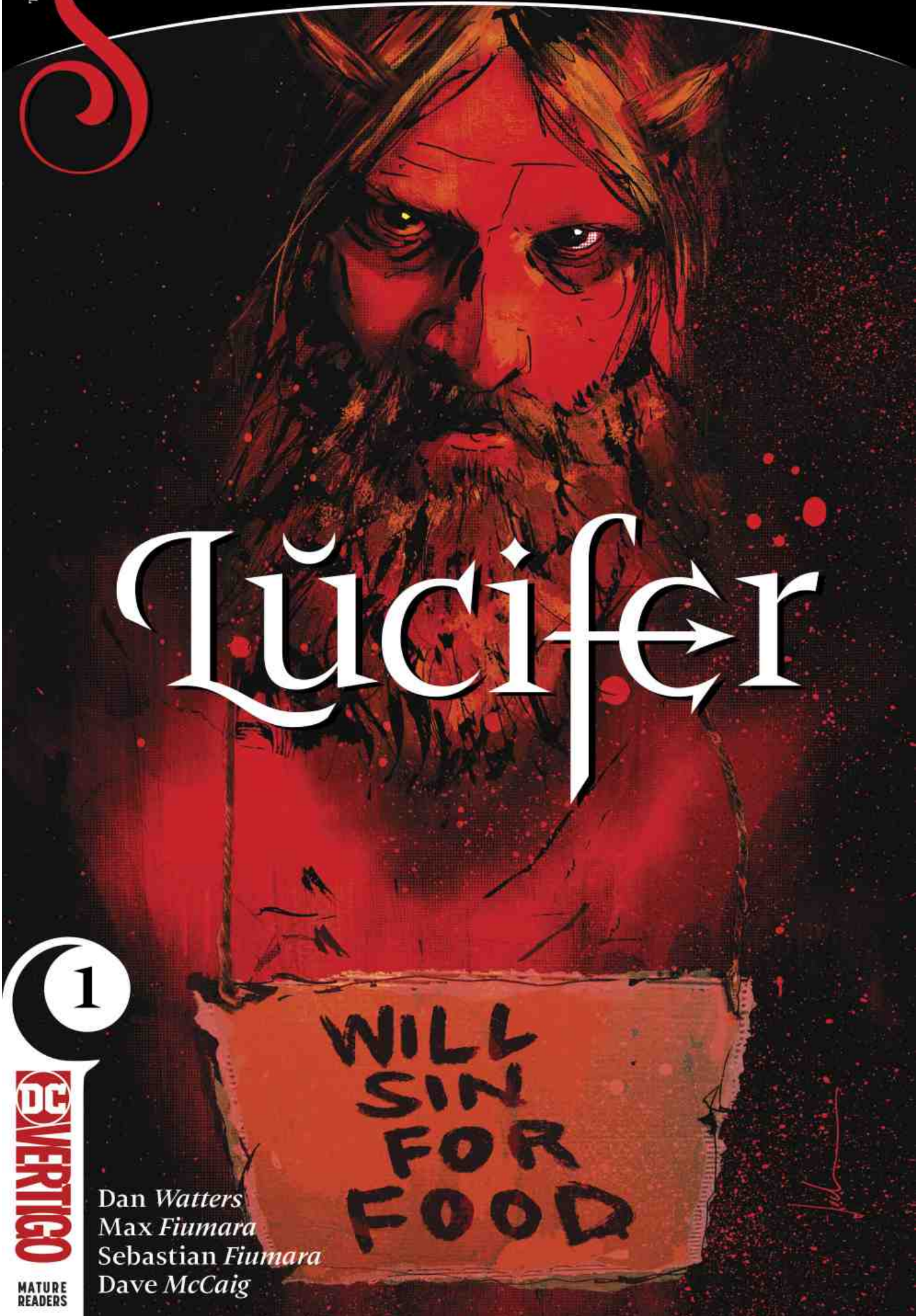
THE SANDMAN ✦ UNIVERSE



Lucifer

1

DC VERTIGO

MATURE READERS

Dan *Watters*
Max *Fiumara*
Sebastian *Fiumara*
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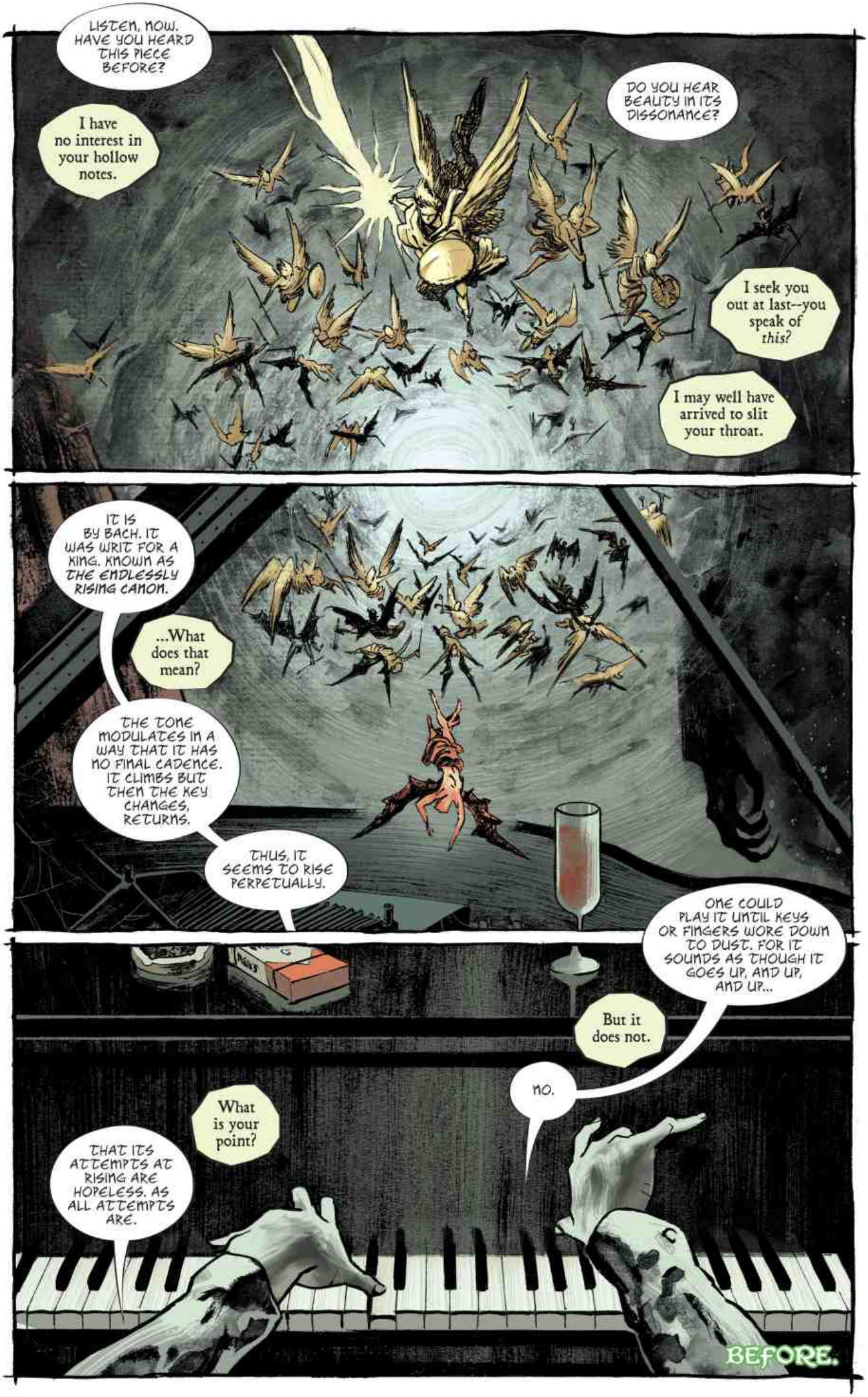
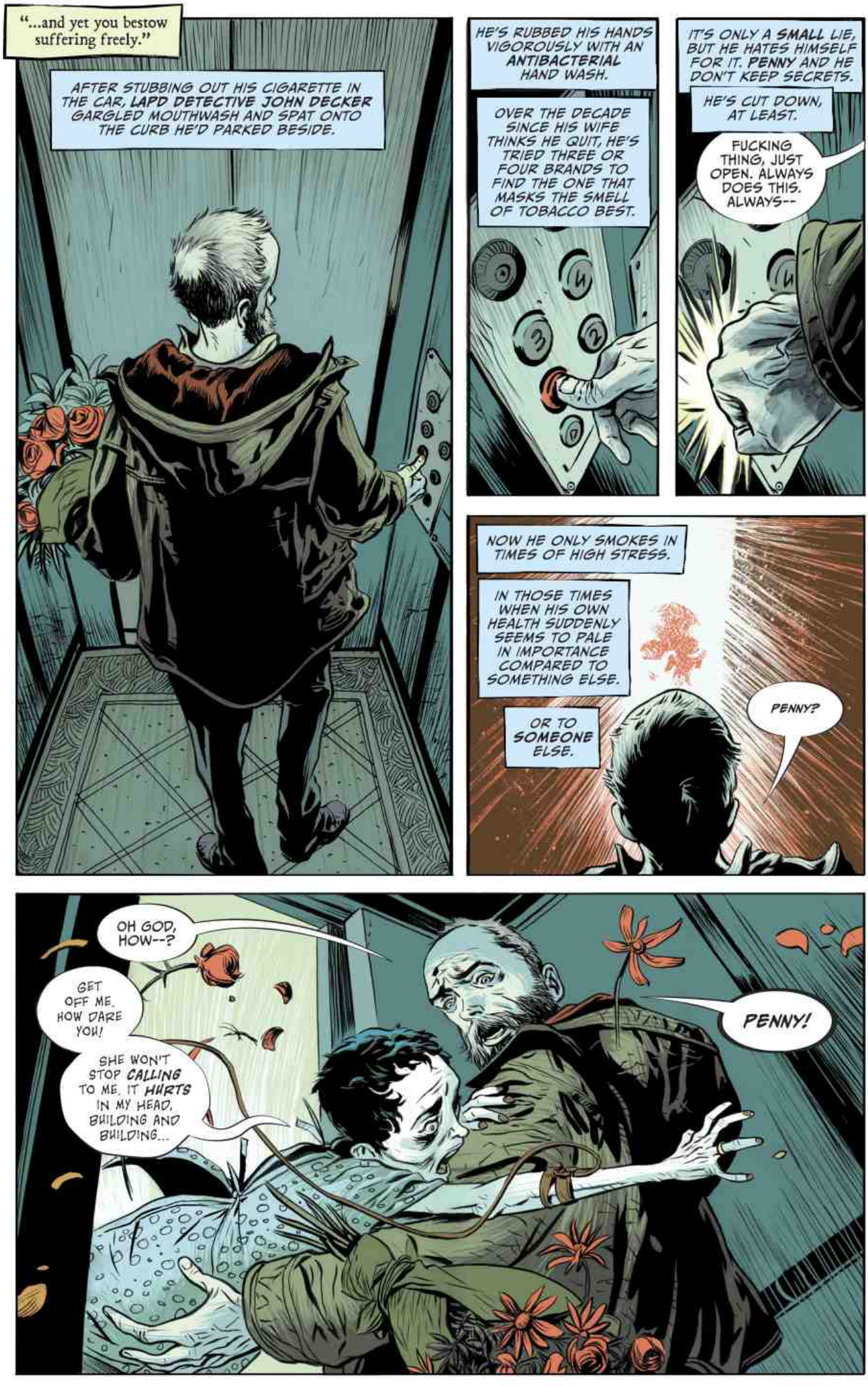
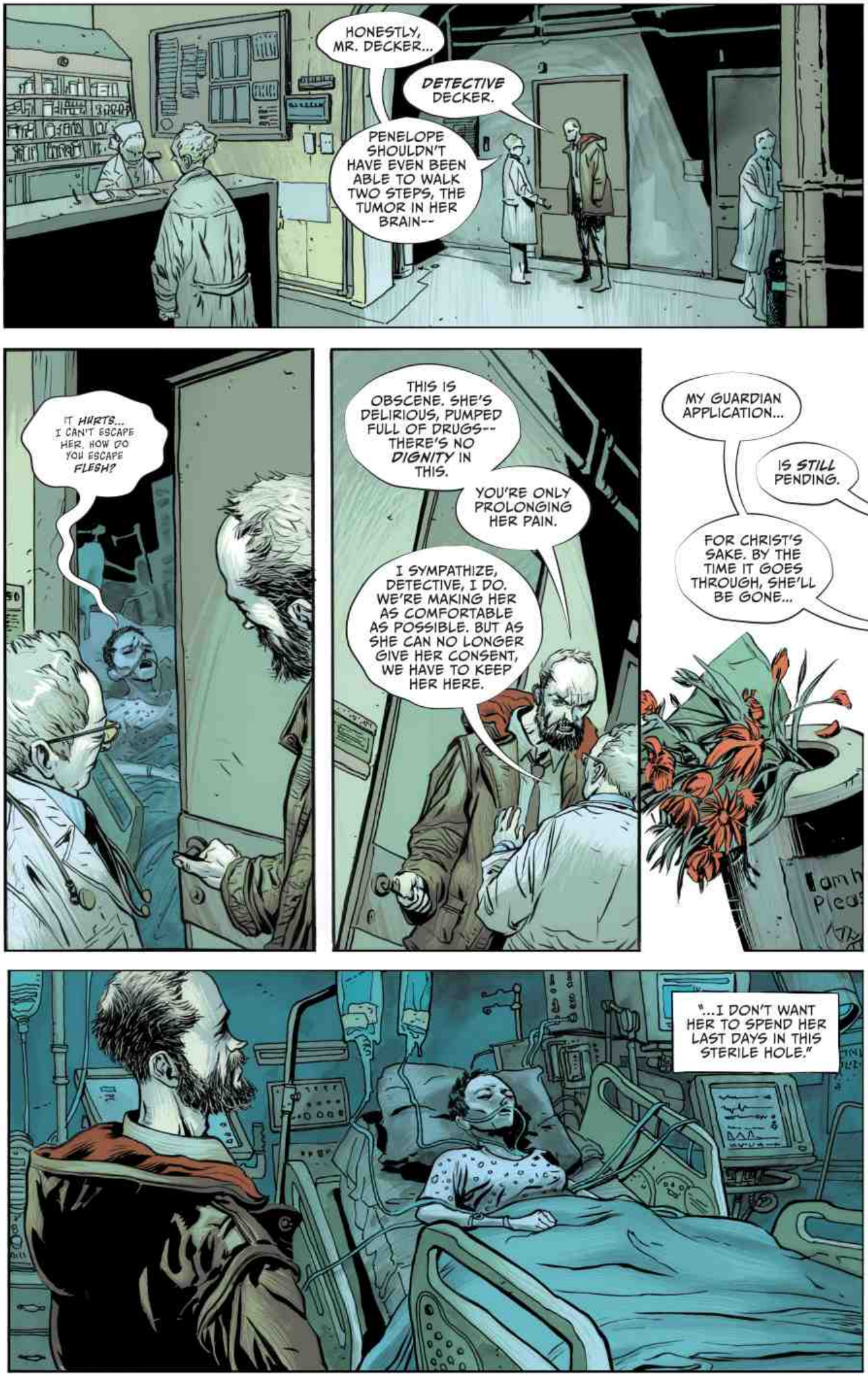

LISTEN, NOW. HAVE YOU HEARD THIS PIECE BEFORE?
I have no interest in your hollow notes.
DO YOU HEAR BEAUTY IN ITS DISSONANCE?
I seek you out at last--you speak of *this?*
I may well have arrived to slit your throat.
IT IS BY BACH. IT WAS WRIT FOR A KING. KNOWN AS THE ENDLESSLY RISING CANON.
...What does that mean?
THE TONE MODULATES IN A WAY THAT IT HAS NO FINAL CADENCE. IT CLIMBS BUT THEN THE KEY CHANGES, RETURNS.
THUS, IT SEEMS TO RISE PERPETUALLY.
ONE COULD PLAY IT UNTIL KEYS OR FINGERS WORE DOWN TO DUST. FOR IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH IT GOES UP, AND UP, AND UP...
But it does not.
NO.
What is your point?
THAT ITS ATTEMPTS AT RISING ARE HOPELESS. AS ALL ATTEMPTS ARE.
BEFORE.

ELSEWHERE. NOW.
I AM HE. THE DARK LORD, LUCIFER.
EAT YOUR BREAKFAST.
I AM THE MORNING STAR. THE LIGHT BRINGER. THE FIRST OF THE DAMNED.
IT'S GOT A BIT OF SALT IN IT. HOW YOU LIKE IT.
I AM HE WHO LED THE FIRST WAR, THE GREATEST WAR, OF WHICH ALL OTHER WARS ARE MERE SHADES AND REFLECTIONS.
IT'S GOING TO GO COLD...
...AND OATS ARE NO GOOD COLD, ARE THEY?
I AM HE WHO WAS CAST DOWN FOR SPITTING IN THE FACE OF THE ALMIGHTY, WHO REIGNED IN HELL OVER MAN AND DEMON AND TORMENTED ALL.
STIR IT, AT LEAST. OR IT'S GOING TO GET A SKIN ON IT.
I HAD THE LORD OF ALL NIGHTMARES CARVE OFF MY WINGS.
THE BLADE WAS SHARP, YET HE STILL HAD TO SAW THROUGH THE GRISTLE AND THE SINEW AND THE BONE.
AND NOW I AM...

THERE IS NO FURTHER TIME FOR BREAKFAST!
I AM TRAPPED IN THIS PLACE, HELD PRISONER BY FORCES THAT HAVE OBSCURED THEMSELVES FROM ME.
BUT THERE ARE SECRETS, HIDDEN IN THE GROUND ITSELF--I CAN HEAR THEM SINGING TO ME.
THEY WILL TEACH ME THE MACHINATIONS OF THIS PLACE, I AM SURE OF IT.
CAREFUL-- TO THE RIGHT. THE RIGHT.
OF COURSE, OF COURSE.
TELL ME, IS IT NICE OUT?
IT'S NOT RAINING... BUT MAYBE TAKE YOUR JACKET JUST IN CASE.
"Why must we do this to one another? All his creatures...
"...why must we rend hope so savagely from the grasp of our fellows?"
"BECAUSE THAT IS HIS CREATION AS DEIGNED. THE TALE OF EVERY FATHER AND HIS SON."
"It does not *have* to be. Your will could change..."


"...and yet you bestow suffering freely."
AFTER STUBBING OUT HIS CIGARETTE IN THE CAR, LAPD DETECTIVE JOHN DECKER GARGLED MOUTHWASH AND SPAT ONTO THE CURB HE'D PARKED BESIDE.
HE'S RUBBED HIS HANDS VIGOROUSLY WITH AN ANTIBACTERIAL HAND WASH.
OVER THE DECADE SINCE HIS WIFE THINKS HE QUIT, HE'S TRIED THREE OR FOUR BRANDS TO FIND THE ONE THAT MASKS THE SMELL OF TOBACCO BEST.
IT'S ONLY A SMALL LIE, BUT HE HATES HIMSELF FOR IT. PENNY AND HE DON'T KEEP SECRETS.
HE'S CUT DOWN, AT LEAST.
FUCKING THING, JUST OPEN. ALWAYS DOES THIS. ALWAYS--
NOW HE ONLY SMOKES IN TIMES OF HIGH STRESS.
IN THOSE TIMES WHEN HIS OWN HEALTH SUDDENLY SEEMS TO PALE IN IMPORTANCE COMPARED TO SOMETHING ELSE.
OR TO SOMEONE ELSE.
PENNY?
OH GOD, HOW--?
GET OFF ME. HOW DARE YOU!
SHE WON'T STOP CALLING TO ME. IT HURTS IN MY HEAD, BUILDING AND BUILDING...
PENNY!

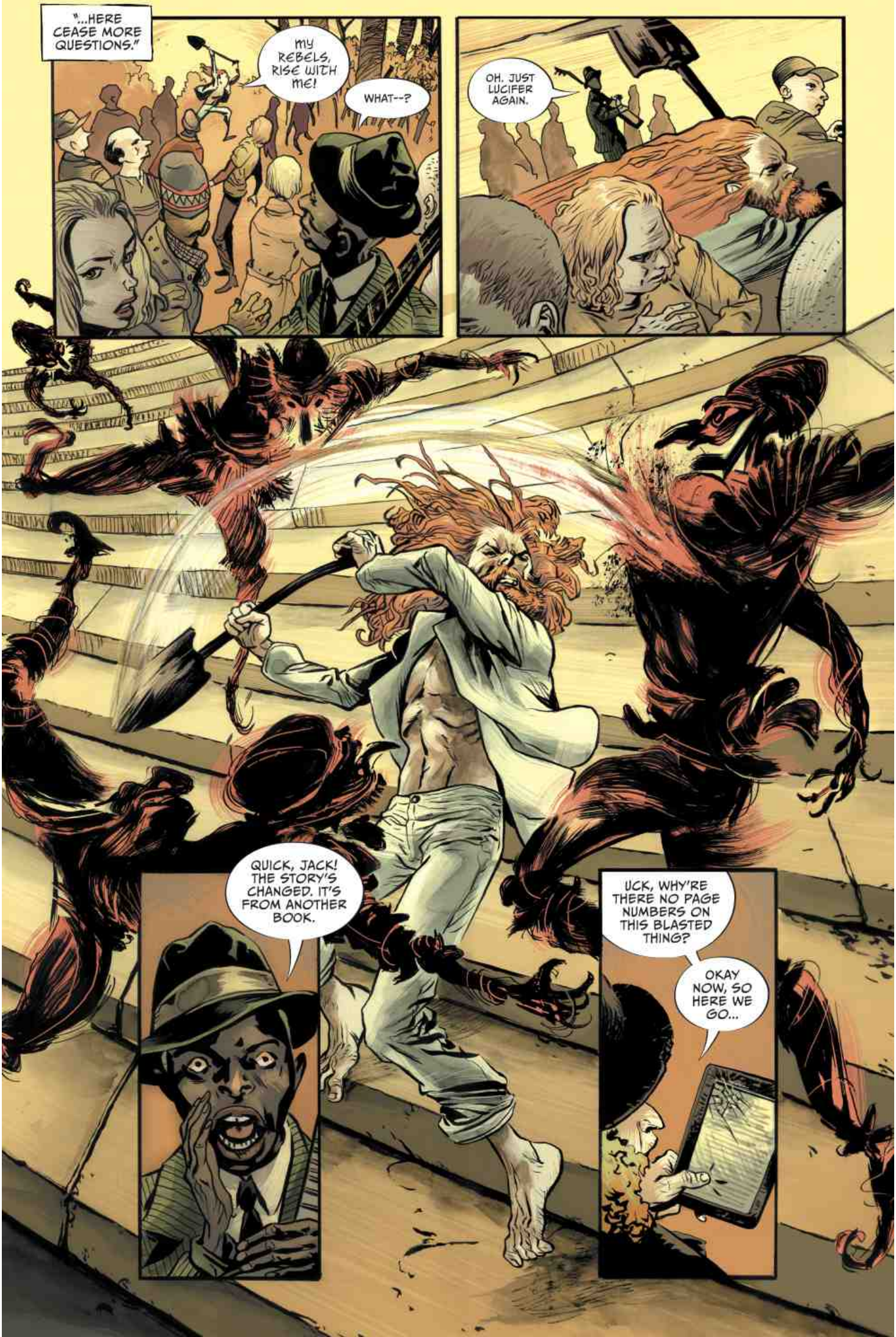

HONESTLY, MR. DECKER...
DETECTIVE DECKER.
PENELOPE SHOULDN'T HAVE EVEN BEEN ABLE TO WALK TWO STEPS, THE TUMOR IN HER BRAIN--
IT HURTS... I CAN'T ESCAPE HER. HOW DO YOU ESCAPE FLESH?
THIS IS OBSCENE. SHE'S DELIRIOUS, PUMPED FULL OF DRUGS-- THERE'S NO DIGNITY IN THIS.
YOU'RE ONLY PROLONGING HER PAIN.
I SYMPATHIZE, DETECTIVE, I DO. WE'RE MAKING HER AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE. BUT AS SHE CAN NO LONGER GIVE HER CONSENT, WE HAVE TO KEEP HER HERE.
MY GUARDIAN APPLICATION...
IS STILL PENDING.
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE. BY THE TIME IT GOES THROUGH, SHE'LL BE GONE...
"...I DON'T WANT HER TO SPEND HER LAST DAYS IN THIS STERILE HOLE."

WHERE ARE WE GOING?
DRIVING. LIKE I SAID. THE WAY WE USED TO, REMEMBER? THAT'S IT. COME ON, PENNY. WE NEED TO BE QUICK.
WHEN WE WERE KIDS. JUST MARRIED.
WE USED TO DRIVE DOWN THE HIGHWAY. WE'D GO SOUTH, OUT OF L.A. YOU'D DRIVE SO FAST. AWAY FROM WORK AND STRESS AND EVERYTHING THAT WASN'T YOU AND ME.
THOSE WERE THE ONLY TIMES I EVER SAW YOU BREAK THE LAW. EVER AT ALL.
YOU PUSHED THROUGH THE SPEED LIMIT AS THOUGH THE DEVIL WAS AT OUR BACK.
BUT WE WERE LAUGHING, AND THE SUN WAS SHINING...
AND FOR A MOMENT A SMILE LIGHTS UP HER FACE. HER SMILE. THE ONE SHE'D HAD BACK THEN.
AND IN A FLICKER IT'S GONE.
HE WAS AT OUR BACK. OH, JOHN...ALL THIS FOR ROBERT'S SINS...
ALL THIS FOR GATELY HOUSE.
ROBERT...? YOU MEAN YOUR COUSIN?
YOU'VE BEEN SMOKING IN HERE, HAVEN'T YOU, JOHN?
I'VE LIED TO YOU, TOO. AND NOW I CAN'T EXPLAIN. IT HURTS SO MUCH.
JOHN'S FOOT ON THE ACCELERATOR SLOWLY PLUMMETS...

...HE WOULD DO ANYTHING TO HEAR PENNY LAUGH AGAIN.
AHAHAHAHA!
BUT...MY LORD LUCIFER, WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT AMUSES YOU SO.
WE HAVE PUT OUT OUR EYES TO BE MORE AS YOU ARE.
NOW WILL YOU NOT HELP US? WE STILL SEEK OUR THIRD SO OUR COVEN CAN BE COMPLETE.
"WHEN SHALL WE TWO MEET AGAIN" HAS NEVER HAD THE SAME RING TO IT.
BUT, MY DEAR GIRLS, I CAN RESTORE MY EYES JUST LIKE THIS, SEE?
CAN YOU DO THAT, TOO? IF NOT, IT WAS A FOOLISH THING TO DO, I'M AFRAID.
LUCIFER.
LADIES.
AH, GOOD MORNING, BILL. I CAN SEE YOU TODAY.

DID HE TRULY RESTORE HIS EYES?
HE CAN'T HAVE. HE IS PLAYING TRICKS ON US AGAIN.
GOOD NEWS! I AM GOING DIGGING. TODAY I SHALL FREE US ALL FROM THIS PLACE ALTOGETHER.
AS YOU SAID YESTERDAY. AND THE DAY BEFORE.
AH, BUT TODAY IS DIFFERENT THAN YESTERDAY. IN THAT IT IS BEFORE US.
HMM. PERHAPS BEST TO NOT GO WANDERING TODAY.
THOSE PERFORMERS ARE BACK, AND YOU'RE WONT TO GET A LITTLE EMOTIONAL...
THE-- WHO? WHERE?
IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH. THE WHOLE TOWN IS CONGREGATING TO WATCH. JUST LET IT BE, LUCIFER.
MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THIS TYRANNY WILL NOT STAND. CLOTHE THYSELVES IN THY FINEST ARMOR.
WE MARCH NOW AGAINST THEY WHO OPPRESS US HERE, IN THIS DISMAL PLACE.
IT'S OKAY HERE. THERE'S RUNNING WATER AND SO FORTH.
TOGETHER WE SMITE THEM DOWN AND TAKE CHARGE OF OUR DESTINIES!

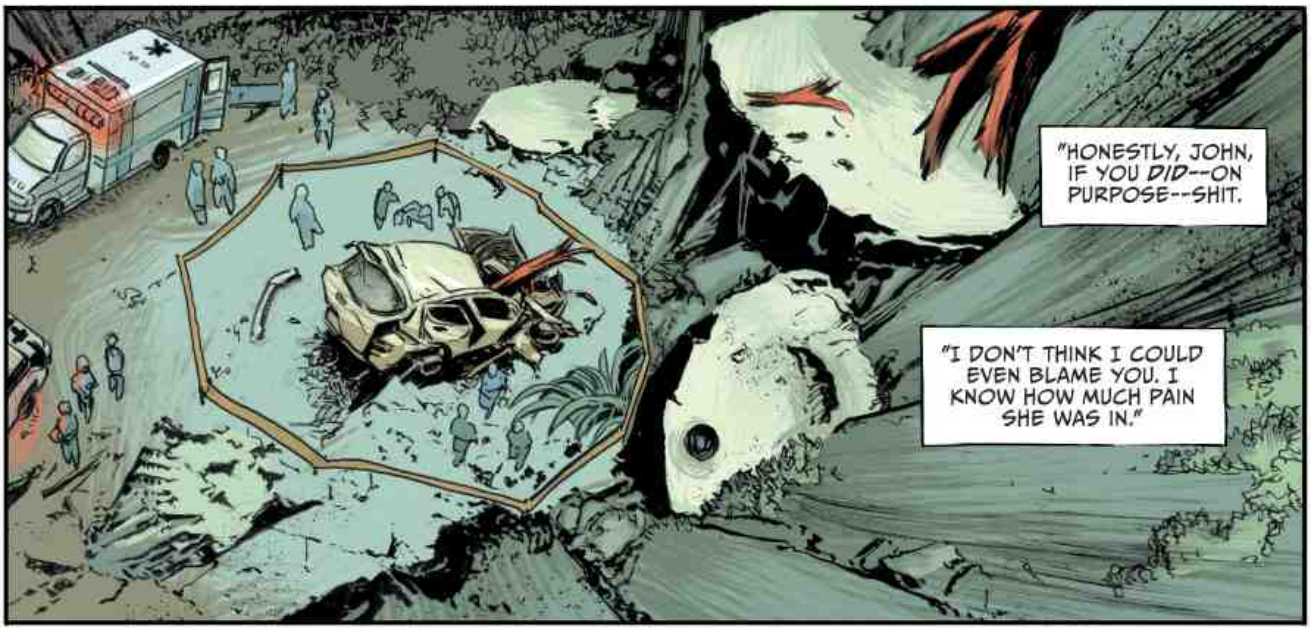
UMM, OKAY, SO THAT'S PROSPERO, AND HE SAYS...
...”BY ACCIDENT MOST STRANGE, BOUNTIFUL FORTUNE, NOW MY DEAR LADY, HATH MINE ENEMIES BROUGHT TO THIS SHORE...”
THE NARRATION'S PRETTY FLAT. BUT THE DANCING IS BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT?
”AND BY MY PRESCIENCE I FIND MY ZENITH DOTH DEPEND UPON A MOST AUSPICIOUS STAR...
”WHOSE INFLUENCE IF NOW I COURT NOT BUT OMIT, MY FORTUNES WILL EVER AFTER DROOP...”


"...HERE CEASE MORE QUESTIONS."
MY REBELS, RISE WITH ME!
WHAT--?
OH. JUST LUCIFER AGAIN.
QUICK, JACK! THE STORY'S CHANGED. IT'S FROM ANOTHER BOOK.
UCK, WHY'RE THERE NO PAGE NUMBERS ON THIS BLASTED THING?
OKAY NOW, SO HERE WE GO...

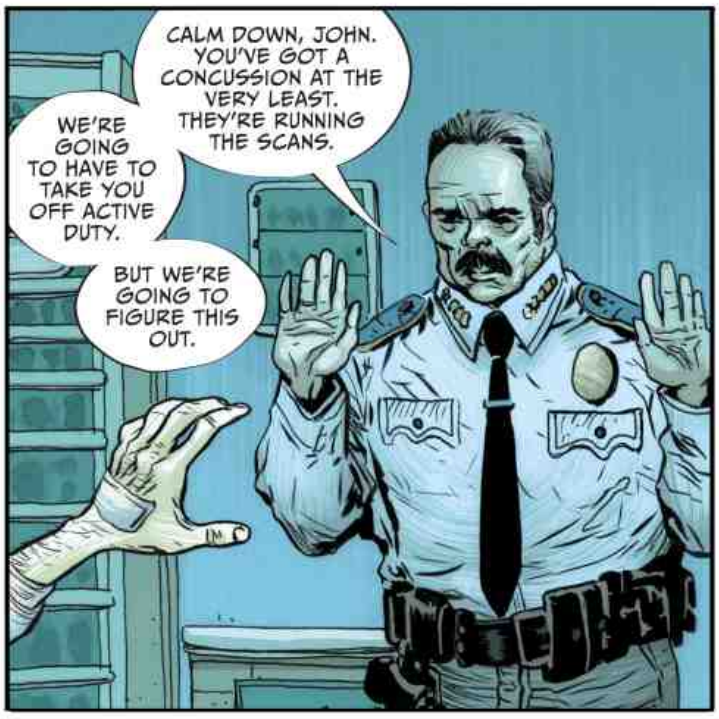
"...AND MICHAEL PIERCED SATAN'S SIDE WITH HIS SPEAR, AND THE DOOMED ARCHANGEL KNEW A SENSATION HE HAD NOT FELT BEFORE.
"YET HE KNEW THAT THIS SENSATION HAD A NAME: THAT IT WENT BY 'PAIN.'
"AND HE HEARD THE *SHRIEKS* OF HIS FELLOW REBELS, AS THEY KNEW THE BATTLE WAS LOST WITH THEIR LEADER'S FALL."

"EVEN WITH MICHAEL'S FOOT UPON HIS NECK, HE SPAT AND SNARLED THE *FOULEST* BLASPHEMIES.
"BUT TO NO AVAIL--
"THE *GREAT SERPENT* WAS CAST OUT FROM HEAVEN, HIS ANGELS WITH HIM.
"AND FOR NINE DAYS THEY *FELL.*
"THAT'S IT, SO IT IS...
"THAT'S ALL IT SAYS."

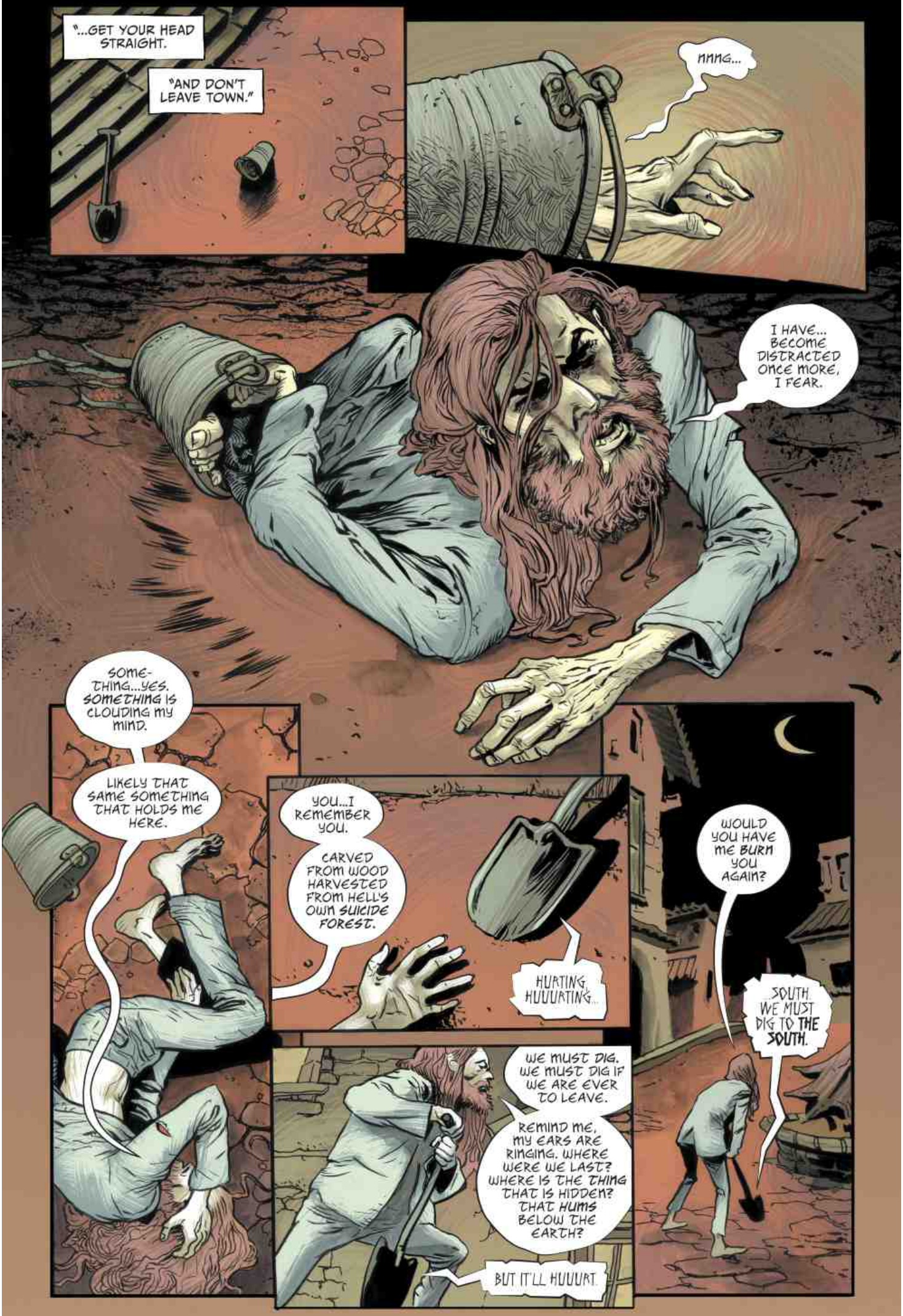
HNNN...
JOHN DECKER WAKES SLOWLY.
HIS CHEST HURTS. AS THOUGH HE'S BEEN COUGHING IN HIS SLEEP.
HE HALF DREAMS OF THE CHEST INFECTION THAT MADE HIM MISS SENIOR YEAR FOOTBALL TRYOUTS. SO LONG AGO NOW, BUT THE MEMORY STILL STINGS.
SOMETHING ELSE STINGS, TOO. IN HIS ARM. SOMETHING...
OH GOD, PENNY? OH GOD.
PENNY!

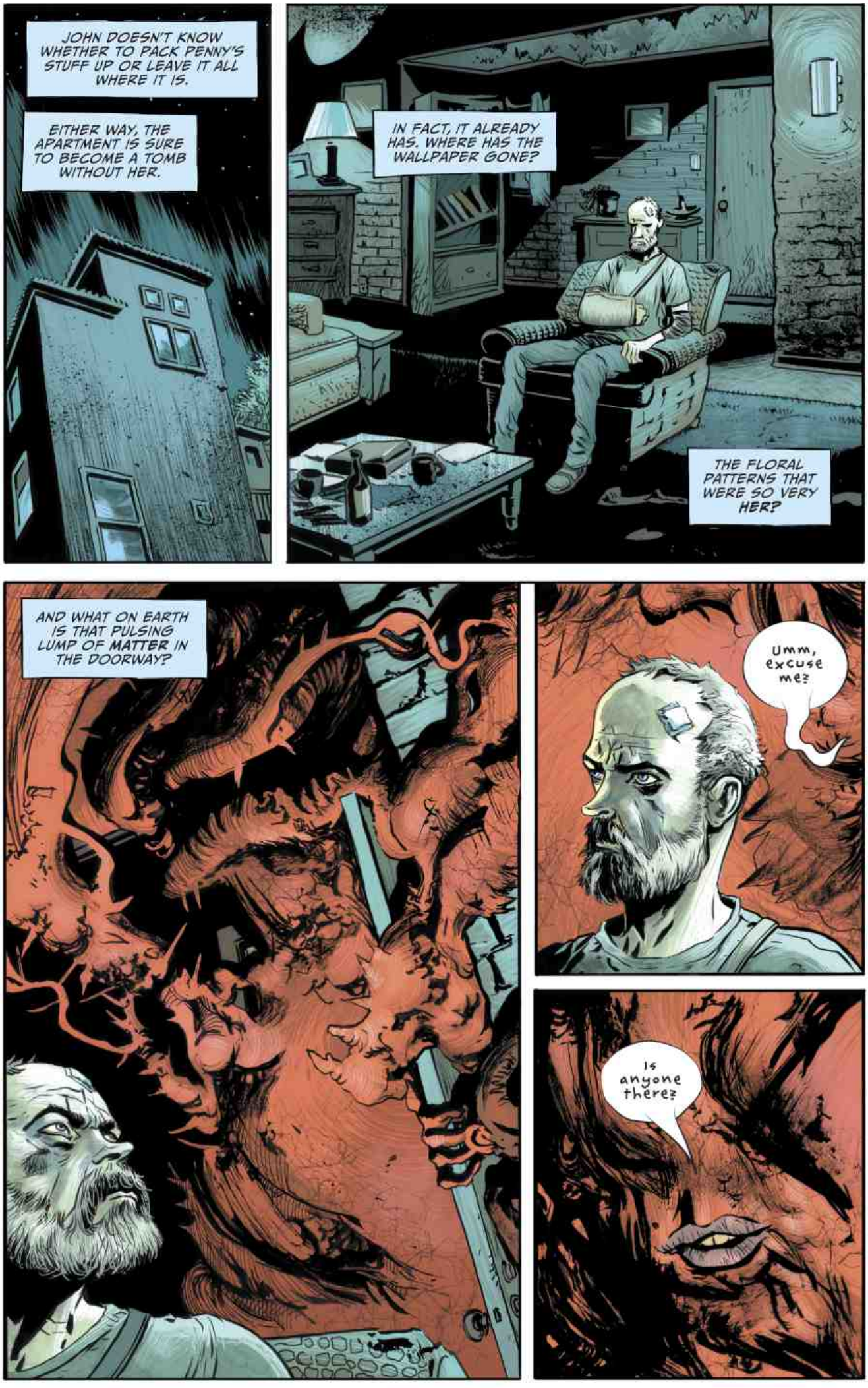

"HONESTLY, JOHN, IF YOU *DID*--ON PURPOSE--SHIT.
"I DON'T THINK I COULD EVEN BLAME YOU. I KNOW HOW MUCH PAIN SHE WAS IN."

F-FUCK, CAPTAIN! YOU THINK THIS WAS A *SUICIDE BID?!*
I DIDN'T. I *WOULDN'T--*
I MUST HAVE LOST CONTROL. I JUST WANTED TO TAKE HER FOR A DRIVE...LIKE WE USED TO.


CALM DOWN, JOHN. YOU'VE GOT A CONCUSSION AT THE VERY LEAST. THEY'RE RUNNING THE SCANS.
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE YOU OFF ACTIVE DUTY.
BUT WE'RE GOING TO FIGURE THIS OUT.

YOU KNOW EVERYONE AT THE PRECINCT IS ON YOUR SIDE, RIGHT?
SO GO HOME...


"...GET YOUR HEAD STRAIGHT.
"AND DON'T LEAVE TOWN."
MMMG...
I HAVE... BECOME DISTRACTED ONCE MORE, I FEAR.
SOME-THING...YES. SOMETHING IS CLOUDING MY MIND.
LIKELY THAT SAME SOMETHING THAT HOLDS ME HERE.
YOU...I REMEMBER YOU.
CARVED FROM WOOD HARVESTED FROM HELL'S OWN SUICIDE FOREST.
HURTING. HUUURTING...
WOULD YOU HAVE ME BURN YOU AGAIN?
SOUTH. WE MUST DIG TO THE SOUTH.
WE MUST DIG. WE MUST DIG IF WE ARE EVER TO LEAVE.
REMIND ME, MY EARS ARE RINGING. WHERE WERE WE LAST? WHERE IS THE THING THAT IS HIDDEN? THAT HUMS BELOW THE EARTH?
BUT IT'LL HUUURT.


JOHN DOESN'T KNOW WHETHER TO PACK PENNY'S STUFF UP OR LEAVE IT ALL WHERE IT IS.
EITHER WAY, THE APARTMENT IS SURE TO BECOME A TOMB WITHOUT HER.
IN FACT, IT ALREADY HAS. WHERE HAS THE WALLPAPER GONE?
THE FLORAL PATTERNS THAT WERE SO VERY HER?
AND WHAT ON EARTH IS THAT PULSING LUMP OF MATTER IN THE DOORWAY?
Umm, excuse me?
Is anyone there?

only, we're here in this place...
...and it's not supposed to be the way it is, I don't think?
I think this is the right place to call--I'm just trying to reach those who wore my name.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS.
ROBERT?
IS THAT YOU, ROBERT?
Gately House was never meant for you.
UNH?!

ON THE PLANE FROM L.A.X. JOHN DECKER SLEEPS AGAIN, HALF HOPING FOR ANOTHER DREAM OF FRACTURED SYMBOLS.
WILLING HIS SUBCONSCIOUS TO TURN OVER PENELOPE'S FINAL, CRYPTIC WORDS--
--TO DRAW SOME MEANING FROM THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF IT ALL.
BUT HE DREAMS ONLY MUNDANE, SAVAGE DREAMS, OF BROKEN GLASS AND TWISTED METAL FLECKED RED.
ORLAN
INTERN
AIRPOR
NOTHING TO COMBAT OR EXPLAIN THE RESTLESSNESS THAT HAS DRAWN HIM OVER TWO THOUSAND MILES ON THE DAY OF HIS WIFE'S FUNERAL TO AN ADDRESS HE FOUND ONLINE...
GATELY
HOUSE
SOBER LIVING
FACILITY
TO
LIVE
AGAIN

Can we help you?
UH, SORRY. I JUST THOUGHT I SAW...
OH...
The *people* here are in recovery. They do not appreciate *gawkers* or sightseers.
I'M SORRY.
LOOK...BY ANY CHANCE HAVE YOU HEARD OF A ***ROBERT EWELL?***
HE WAS A COUSIN OF MY WIFE'S.
SHE PASSED... RECENTLY. I'M TRYING TO TRACK HIM DOWN.
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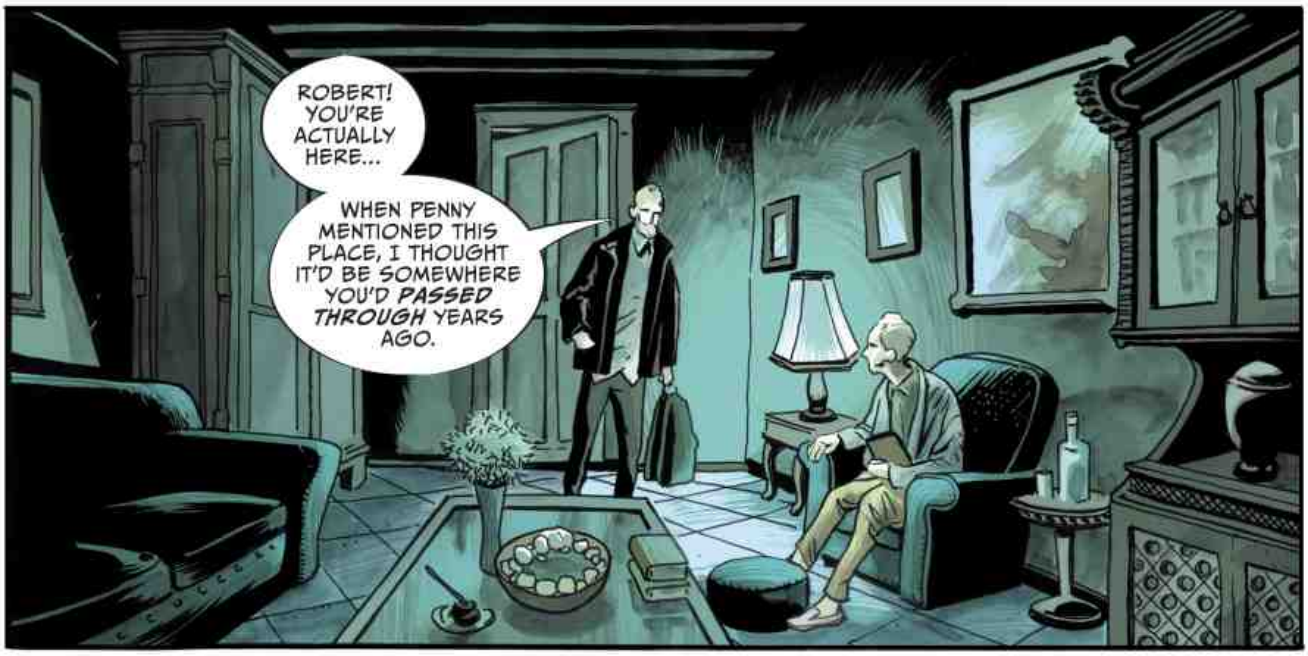
I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHY--I THINK HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN HERE AT SOME POINT?
I KNOW HE'S HAD...ISSUES. ***DRUGS***. AND SOME THEFT CHARGES, I GUESS. SHE NEVER REALLY TOLD ME, NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT.
I'M JUST TRYING TO PICK UP HIS TRAIL.
He's here.
In Gately House.
Families... are difficult, aren't they?
JOHN? ***JOHN DECKER!***
IS THAT YOU OUT THERE? MY GOD!


ROBERT! YOU'RE ACTUALLY HERE...
WHEN PENNY MENTIONED THIS PLACE, I THOUGHT IT'D BE SOMEWHERE YOU'D PASSED THROUGH YEARS AGO.

YEAH, WELL. IT'S BEEN A TOUGH FEW YEARS. YOU KNOW WHERE THEY SAY ROADS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS LEAD.
SIT DOWN, SIT DOWN--
PENNY ISN'T WITH YOU?

OH GOD. JOHN, WHAT'S WRONG?

DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
"WHY MUST WE SUFFER? BECAUSE WE DESIRE. AND DESIRES ARE NEVER AT AN END..."
"That is not so. I tire of your lies..."

...and you've stopped playing Bach's eternal piece.
Nothing is *truly* eternal. Even that which does seem so from within...
What is that sound I hear, beyond this door?
I hear them now the music's at an end. Those gentle screams...soft sobs of suffering...
Are you *torturing* someone in this place?
PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT. PERHAPS ENDLESS STRIVING DISTRACTS, AND PREVENTS US FROM FACING HELLS THAT LURK BENEATH LIFE'S FLIMSY, THIN VENEER.
YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE SUFFERED AT MY HAND.
BE WARNED, TO SEEK PITY IS FOR THE WEAK.
AND YET I HAD EXPECTED YOU THIS DAY AND DO INDEED HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.
SO WALK WITH ME, O CALIBAN...
...MY SON.
"WALK WITH ME AND LET'S GREET YOUR DEAR MOTHER."

you...
THOUGH HERE YOU ARE RENDERED MERE STONE...
...I REMEMBER THE FEEL OF YOUR FACE. ITS CONTOURS.
YOUR NAME IS... CALIBAN.
IT IS YOU WHO HAVE TRAPPED ME HERE, I AM SURE OF IT.
AND WHEN I LEAVE THIS PLACE, IT IS YOU I WILL BURN TO ASH.
To Be Continued

Lucifer

"THE FALL FROM GRACE AND DOWN THE STAIRS"

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Curated for THE SANDMAN UNIVERSE by Neil Gaiman

NEXT ISSUE:
OF RED DEATH AND GINGER TOMCATS

Lucifer's plan takes shape, a lavish masquerade is held in the depths of the Great Plague, and an aspiring drunk discovers a gateway to another world.

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